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Written on MAY 23, 2012 AT 8:00 AM by JWICK

# Homeward bound: A Navy physician assistant's journey of a lifetime

Filed under FLEET AND THE FLEET MARINE FORCE, FORCE HEALTH AND SAFETY, HOSPITALS (2 COMMENTS)

**U.S. Navy Lt. Sarah Browning was deployed to Afghanistan, Uruzgan Province in support of Operation Enduring Freedom from Nov. 22, 2010 to July 20, 2011.**

*Lt. Sarah Browning, physician assistant, [Naval Health Clinic Hawaii](#)*



Navy Physician Assistant Lt. Sarah Browning gives a medical exam at Naval Health Clinic Hawaii (Photo courtesy of Naval Health Clinic Hawaii)

My name is Lt. Sarah Browning and I am a 44 year old Physician Assistant in the U.S. Navy. Always wanting to serve my country, I enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and it wasn't until later in life when I join the Navy as an officer. So, upon completion of Physician Assistant School in 2008 this seemed to be the perfect opportunity to make my dreams come true and serve as a Naval Officer.

So I signed on the line, raised my right hand, and was well on my way to an exciting and rewarding new career in the Navy.

My first year in the Navy was filled with training and finding my permanent duty station, which was beautiful Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Before I knew it I was on my way to Afghanistan to be stationed with a U.S. Army Special Forces unit at a remote firebase. My primary job was to focus on providing humanitarian assistance to the local populations and most importantly to aid the Special Force team medics with stabilization and transportation of the more seriously wounded.

I arrived at the firebase early January 2011, the camp was cold and small and I was nervous, being the only female on post. I was required to use the same restrooms and showers as the Army Soldiers and the Afghan Special Forces. Needless to say this took some time for adjustment, but eventually I settled in. My job at this remote site included clinic everyday and stabilization of the more seriously injured for transport. I worked hand-in-hand with the Special Forces providing a friendly environment where locals could come to be medically

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treated or just listened too. The women loved coming to the clinic ... this was a “safe haven” for them where they could come and share their experiences and be free to talk without fear. The children also loved coming ... as I would spoil them as often as I got the chance with all of the great treats and candies provided by Americans.

Working in the clinic as a medical provider, I saw a lot of heartache. I saw a country struggling and a medical care system even more dismay. We all did our best for the locals providing a little bit of love with every person we treated. Some were so sick with chronic illnesses that I knew they were not going to live a long life, but I sure spoiled them as much as I could while they were in my care. There were a number of cases I treated with really good results at the treatment end. For example, a local Afghan who smashed his finger and presented with an open finger fracture, but by the end of his treatment course had an almost straight finger without infection. Another case involved a little girl that had severe 2nd and 3rd degree burns covering her arms and face but after several weeks of treatment and care, I was shocked at how well she healed. However, the most priceless were the smiles on their faces once their treatment was complete. I was so happy to help people and felt that I did because they had nobody else and were miles away from any other treatment facility.

The Special Forces units allowed me to go outside the wire with them to visit the women and children. The women were so happy to see me, some would stay in the confines of their compound scared to come out and be seen. So I would go to them and try to provide what they needed. This was their culture and how they lived, so I respected them for this and did what I could for them. My tour in Afghanistan was truly life changing. I learned how to be thankful for everything and not complain about the small stuff. I learned to be thankful for something as simple as an ice cube which was something that I did not have at this remote base. I really came away from this tour having a new respect for all people and really having no tolerance for people who are mean. I realized that it is so easy to be nice to people and friendly ... sometimes something as simple as a smile can change someone's day and make them feel better even when they have nothing according to our standards of living.

I cannot end this blog without mentioning what else I came away with while at this very remote firebase. There were several camp dogs ... most of them kept to themselves, but there was one that I grew very fond of while in Afghanistan. Rambo and his sister were brought to the camp as puppies shortly after my arrival. It wasn't long before I took on the job of making sure they were fed. Dogs in Afghanistan are not treated very well ... they usually get shot or they are used for fighting. I knew that my new friend would not live long in this country if I did not do something to save him.

Time was passing and my Afghanistan tour was coming to a end, people often mentioned to me that I should take Rambo to the United States, but I thought that this would be impossible for me to accomplish. After much thought and at one point Rambo almost being shot I decided that I would do everything in my power to take this furry guy home with me. Next, I had to figure out how I was going to get him from this remote firebase to the United States. I contacted a rescue group in Afghanistan which is overseen by an American and with their help made all the necessary arrangements. At this point, Rambo was well on his way back to Hawaii to live with me where he would truly be my dog to live and run without



Physician Assistant Lt. Sarah Browning and Rambo, a camp dog she adopted while deployed (Photo courtesy of Naval Health Clinic Hawaii)

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fear.

The day came when Rambo and I would begin our transition to the United States.. Our journey was long, but many people helped us along the way to make the necessary stops and ensure his transport to the U.S. His journey has been an amazing one and currently he is doing well with me in Hawaii. I am so happy because although I could not bring any of those children home with me ... I did rescue Rambo and for that I am truly thankful and feel as if it is one of the best things I have ever done in my life.

I would like to give a special thank you to all the angels that supported my journey to rescue Rambo from Afghanistan so he could have the chance to run free and roll in green grass as all dogs should.

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You should take part in a contest for one of the best blogs on the web. I will recommend this site! 266690

Disha Patel  
Lt. Sarah, you are a very brave and smart person. I am very proud and thankful to what you do for this country. I hope you have a great future ahead and keep doing what you do. 😊

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